

CHAPTER VII

Fort Leavenworth During the Seventies

Garrison life at Fort Leavenworth, during the years from 1870 to 1880, was comparatively uneventful. The preceding years had seen much of active service and hardship, but with the year 1870 began a brief period of rest and recreation. In his *Personnel Recollections*, General Nelson A. Miles says that this period, "when the larger garrison was gathered at the post, offered an opportunity for social civilities and recreation."

The "larger garrison" which he mentioned had reference to the return in 1870 of the Headquarters of the Department of Missouri from St. Louis to Fort Leavenworth. By this time the transfers of Department Headquarters back and forth between St. Louis and Fort Leavenworth had become so frequent that it must have been rather confusing to keep track of the seat of Departmental authority. During the winter of 1869-70, it was moved from Fort Leavenworth to St. Louis to make room at the Post for the Seventh Cavalry which had been on the plains during the winter. Yet on April 15, 1870, Headquarters was moved back to Fort Leavenworth with General Pope in command where he remained until 1883. From 1883 until 1890, the Department was under the successive commands of Generals C. C. Augur, Nelson A. Miles, J. H. Potter, Orlando Wilcox, and Wesley Merritt. In May, 1890, the Department was moved to St. Louis.

In 1868, the Leavenworth Coal Company obtained authority to purchase twenty acres in the southeastern part of the Post for the purpose of operating a coal mine. In spite of various efforts made to acquire portions of the Reservation, this is the only part of Fort Leavenworth which has fallen into private hands since the survey of 1830. The attempts to use the Reservation for other than military purposes included the effort of the Rock Island Railway Company. In 1871 the company began to handle the traffic of

the Post from a station at the east end of the Fort Leavenworth railroad bridge, which was under construction at that time. Without authority, and in spite of repeated prohibitions, the company proceeded to construct roundhouses, terminals, and such other buildings on the reservation. So persistent was the company, that it actually held possession of the land for twenty years and finally moved out when threatened with the use of force.

A writer of the period furnishes the following impressive picture of Department Headquarters:

“Fort Leavenworth is the headquarters of the Department of Missouri, which includes the States of Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, and Colorado; the territory of New Mexico, and the Indian Territory; Forts Elliott and Bliss, Texas, including the town of San Elizario on the Rio Grande, and that portion of El Paso County lying north of an east and west line passing immediately south of San Elizario, Camp on Snake River, and Supply Depot at Rawlins Station, Wyoming Territory. The Department is commanded by Major General John Pope. The Department Staff is as follows: Major E. R. Platt, Adjutant General; Major J. J. Coppinger, 10th Infantry, Acting Assistant Inspector General; Lieutenant Colonel Judson D. Bingham, Chief Quartermaster; Major George Bell, Chief Commissary of Subsistence; Major D. L. Magruder, Surgeon, U. S. A., Attending Surgeon; Major W. R. Gibson, Paymaster, U. S. A., Chief Paymaster; First Lieutenant Thomas N. Bailey, Corps of Engineers, Chief Engineer Officer; Captain D. M. Taylor, Ordnance Department, Aide de Camp; First Lieutenant S. W. Groesbeck, 6th Infantry, on duty in the office of the Judge Advocate of the Department; Captain George Shorkley, 15th Infantry, General Instructor of Musketry; First Lieutenant W. C. Manning, 23d Infantry, Acting General Instructor of Musketry, Chief Ordnance Officer, and Commanding Ordnance Depot; Second Lieutenant William A. Glassford, Signal Corps, Signal Officer, and in charge of military telegraph lines of the Department.”

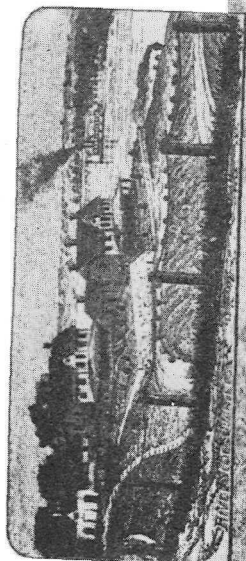
When General Pope came to the Post in command of the Department, he at once took steps to provide additional

quarters to meet the demands of the increase in officers and of the staff personnel. Plans were made to permit the extension of the group of buildings towards the west, in fact to build the equivalent of an entire new post. Shortly afterward, the War Department made an allotment of \$50,000 to permit the construction of four double sets and one single set of officers' quarters. These were located on Kearney Avenue, directly west of 410-450 Kearney Avenue (Engineer Hall). At this time, the term "West End Parade" first came into use. General Pope requested \$350,000 for carrying out his plans. General Sherman was in favor of the enlargement, and made the following representations to the Senate in favor of the plan:

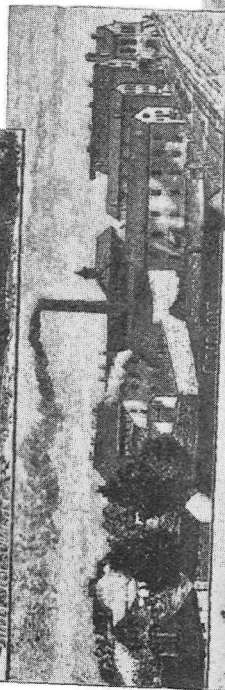
"Fort Leavenworth is the most valuable military reservation in the West. It will always be the most appropriate depot and headquarters of a department, and should have barracks for a battalion of infantry, a regiment of cavalry, and suitable buildings for headquarters. These in part already exist, and the appropriation herein asked for is deemed ample to complete the whole.

"In my judgment, it is better to ask for this appropriation 'special,' rather than to undertake the work by driblets out of annual appropriations for the maintenance of the army. Though the amount asked for may seem large, it is in fact small as compared to the sums expended on our sea-coast forts, which are not half as important for the immediate use of the army."

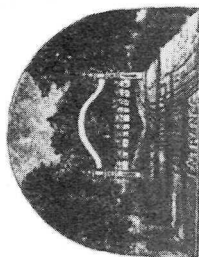
The Senate generally favored the plan but cut the appropriation to \$200,000. The House, however, refused any appropriation at all. As a result, there was little construction in the Post for many years, excepting Engineer Hall on Kearney Avenue and an occasional building here and there. The Post continued to be crowded. The Seventh Cavalry spent each winter at the Fort for several years and the demand for quarters was great. In 1872, another attempt was made to secure an appropriation of \$200,000 for necessary improvements. The attempt came to nothing but it did bring out some interesting comment from James A. Garfield, who in advocating the measure said:



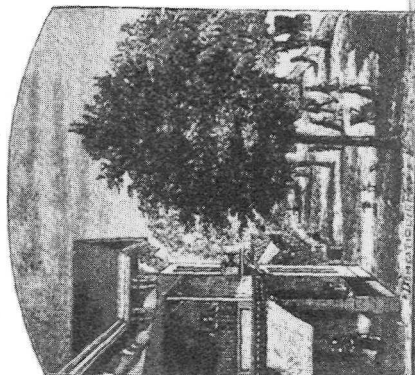
Houses on Riverside, the
U. S. D. B. Area.



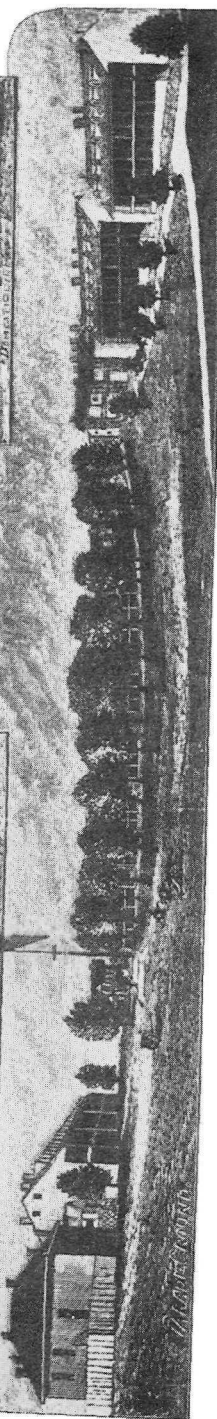
The Beginning of the
U. S. D. B.



Arch at the head of
Grant Avenue.



"Syracuse House" which stood at the
northwest corner of the
Main Parade.



View of the Main Parade (Summer Place),

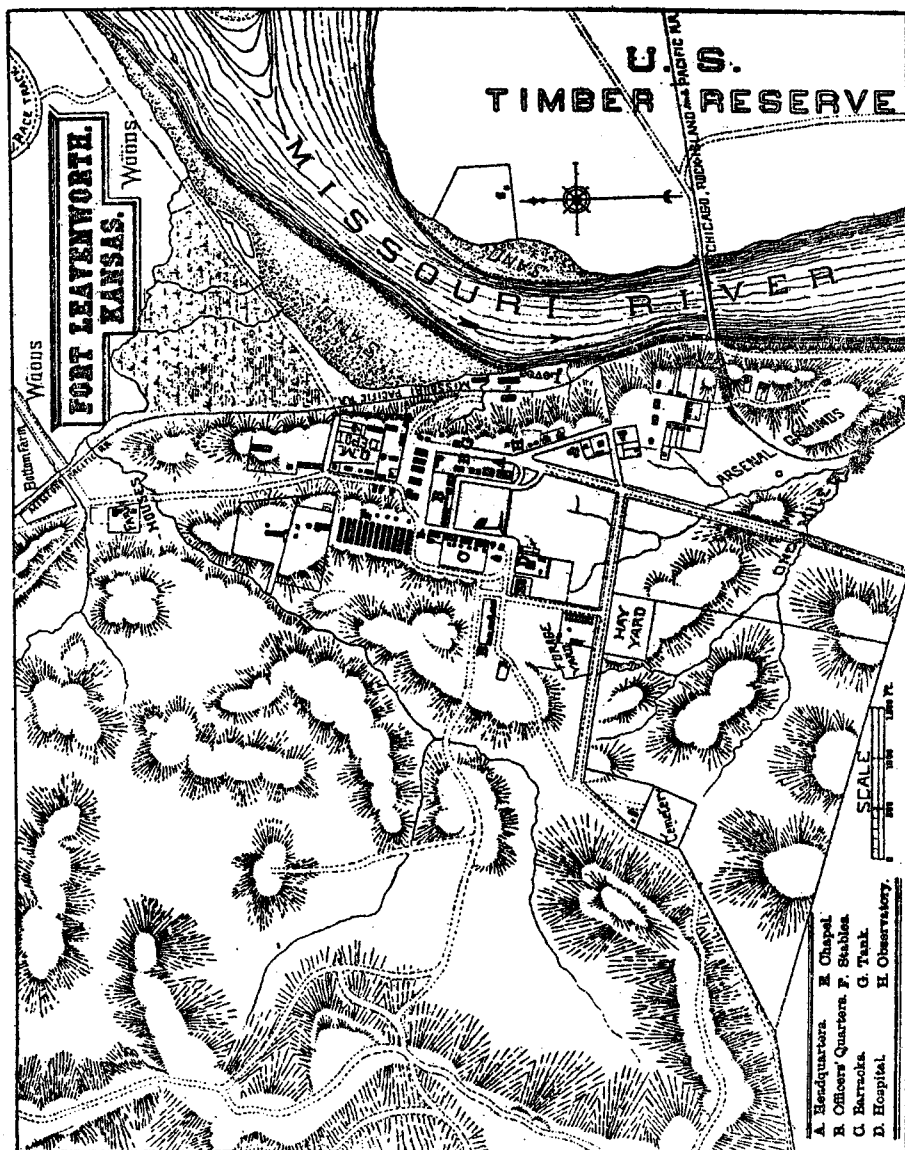
VIEWS OF FORT LEAVENWORTH ABOUT 1877

"Ever since the days of Mr. Floyds secretaryship as Secretary of War, there has been a persistent effort to get rid of the Fort Leavenworth reservation, a reservation of 6,000 acres of land most valuable to the United States. Not less than six times since I have been in Congress an attempt has been made by petitions or by bills, or by an amendment to a bill, to sell the Fort Leavenworth reservation."

The attempts to sell the reservation or diminish its area did not keep the Post from gaining, little by little, those things which gradually built up its appearance and usefulness. In one of the appropriations granted to the arsenal, an expenditure of \$15,000 was authorized by Congress for the construction of a road from the arsenal to the city of Leavenworth. This improvement was made shortly before the discontinuance of the arsenal and is the present Grant Avenue.

The necessity for a military prison was made manifest, and after a considerable study of the subject and a search for a suitable site, Fort Leavenworth was recommended, the new prison to be placed on the grounds of the arsenal. The recommendation met with favor and when on February 2, 1874, an order for the discontinuance of the arsenal and the transfer of its stores to the Rock Island Arsenal, was received, it was definitely decided to locate the new military prison at Fort Leavenworth. Afterwards it was decided by the War Department that the buildings best suited for prison purposes were those occupied by the Quartermaster's Depot on the north side of the Post. It also seemed best to transfer the depot to the buildings in the arsenal grounds. This was done and as soon as Congress appropriated the necessary money, such changes in construction were made as were necessary.

This period also witnessed the construction of the first religious edifices in the Post. In 1871, the first Catholic church was erected on Kearney Avenue. It was occupied for several years, but was finally sold to the War Department together with a school which adjoined it. The building has since been torn down. The Catholic church was replaced in 1889 by St. Ignatius Chapel on McClellan Avenue. The first Post Chapel was built in 1878 and still stands on



Map of Fort Leavenworth about 1875.

the east side of Scott Avenue. The construction was done mostly by prison labor under the supervision of Colonel Asa Blunt who was the Commandant of the U. S. Military Prison.

The farm lands of the reservation were producing good crops at this time, in spite of the grasshopper plague which visited Kansas in 1874. Before the Civil War, the land had been cultivated by the Government under farm superintendents, but after the war, it was decided to lease the land to responsible persons on the share system. This plan was continued until 1884 when the Government, finding that the land under cultivation was needed for military purposes, decided not to renew the leases. In 1874, the lands yielded 14,492 bushels of corn and 350 tons of hay, and this in spite of the fact that the plague of grasshoppers forced a second planting as late as July. The severity of this plague was well described by Surgeon Thomas A. McParlin, as follows:

"The advent of the redlegged locust (grasshopper) has spread great devastation upon nearly all growing crops in this section of the country this month, and the hospital garden had been smitten with the pest. This plague is most discouraging in a State which heretofore has been receiving many emigrants who now are becoming emigrants to other lands. The plague is said to be renewable every seven or eight years. Trenches (ditches) were dug in front of the officers' quarters in the garrison to prevent their entrance into dwellings where they eat holes in all kinds of garments and articles of upholstery and furniture that are in their nature edible. The stench from the dead and putrifying locusts has been a great nuisance. Very many barrels full have been removed, and a variety of deodorants used, but without any great alleviation."

Surgeon McParlin was vigorous in his attempts to improve sanitary conditions in the Post and he submitted the following report:

"Considering the importance, the size, and the character as an established post, having been occupied since 1827, and also the greater security in case of fire, it may be re-

garded as a matter of surprise and regret that the water supply has not been made adequate to all needs and emergencies. For the want of it, cesspits and cesspools continue to honeycomb and saturate the soil, and drainage is imperfect. On this account, except in summer, bathing facilities for all the men cannot be supplied—inasmuch as the water has to be hauled in quantity, only available by water wagon. Indeed very few of the officers—and those of high rank—have proper facilities for hot and cold water supplied in a bath room for themselves or their families. Officers of moderate means cannot afford to purchase expensive copper boilers and bath room fixtures and then, if turned out of quarters by a senior officer, remove them to another set.”

However, in spite of plagues and unsanitary conditions, the people of the Post seem to have made the best of the situation. Dances and theatricals, the advent of the telephone, the arrival of visitors and travelers (for Kansas was no longer on the edge of the United States and visitors were now more common than in the old days)—all helped to enliven the Post. Special occasions for social activities were the frequent visits of the Shermans to Captain Charles H. Hoyt, Quartermaster Corps, a cousin of General Sherman, and the visits of Senator and Mrs. James G. Blaine at the home of Major and Mrs. Dunn. Major Dunn was a member of General Pope’s staff and Mrs. Dunn was daughter of Senator Morrill of Maine.

A race course constructed in the bottoms east of the military prison furnished much amusement and relaxation to the people of the city as well as to the garrison. There was a grandstand for the ladies, who missed few opportunities of occupying it on the days when races were scheduled. The Fort was well supplied with mules and horses, as it still remained the base of supplies for the Plains expeditions. The Seventh Cavalry, with the gallant Custer as its lieutenant colonel and most of its officers heroes of the Civil War, lent much to the winter season while they were waiting for the possible expedition of the coming summer.

Much excitement was caused in Fort Leavenworth when in 1876, Chief Joseph and his band of nearly four hundred Nez Percés Indians, who had been captured in Montana by Colonel Nelson A. Miles, were sent to Fort Leavenworth.

They were confined in the center of the old race track on the Missouri River flats from November, 1877 to July, 1878, and finally were transferred to Indian Territory.

In 1877, the Fort Leavenworth Mess or Club was established. The building occupied by it was built for officers' quarters about the time of the organization of the club. As there seemed to be no other suitable place for it at this time, the War Department authorized the use of the newly constructed building for the purpose. It proved popular at once and soon had to be enlarged by the construction of an annex to the west to make room for the large number of transients constantly visiting the Post.

General Pope, in command of the Department during this period, never ceased to urge that provision be made for the consolidation of the small posts of the Department of Missouri—a concentration which would prove effective both for discipline and the instruction of the troops and also be of less expense to the Government. He recognized clearly that with a lessening of the danger of Indian troubles on the frontier, every interest of the Government and the Army would be promoted by abandoning the small temporary posts in his Department.

General Pope saw his recommendations put into effect, when in 1881, by the establishment of a School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at the Post, General Sherman inaugurated a new era for Fort Leavenworth. In one of the annual reports, he summarized the old period of service of the frontier posts in the West in the following vigorous language:

"Nearly two-thirds of the domain of the United States lies west of the Mississippi, and at the close of the Civil War, the greater part of it was occupied by wild beasts, buffalo, elk, antelope, and deer, and by wild Indians. Now, by the indomitable courage, industry, and thrift of our people, this vast region has become reduced to a condition of comparative civilization. * * * I am sure, from personal observation, that the Regular Army has done its full share in accomplishing this result, and I claim for them a share in the fruits. The troops during this transition period, have lived in holes in the ground, in houses made of green cotton-

wood logs infested by vermin, in temporary shanties, generally without murmur; but now this battle with poverty is over, or nearly so, and I appeal to Congress for generous treatment, for decent quarters for officers and men; * * * to designate the places of *strategic* importance at which to erect suitable *permanent* buildings for quartering properly the troops of the United States."